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STREET SCENERY IN PETERSBURG: SITE OF A DEMOLISHED WOODEN HOUSE.

Frontispiece.

Russia in the Shadows

Russia in the Shadows

By

H. G. Wells

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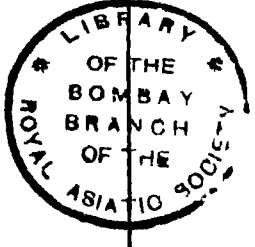

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED *LONDON*

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I. Petersburg in Collapse

I. Petersburg in Collapse

IN January 1914 I visited Petersburg and Moscow for a couple of weeks; in September 1920 I was asked to repeat this visit by Mr. Kamenev, of the Russian Trade Delegation in London. I snatched at this suggestion, and went to Russia at the end of September with my son, who speaks a little Russian. We spent a fortnight and a day in Russia, passing most of our time in Petersburg, where we went about freely by ourselves, and were shown nearly everything we asked to see. We visited Moscow, and I had a long conversation with Mr. Lenin, which I shall relate. In Petersburg I did not stay at the Hotel International, to which foreign visitors are usually sent, but with my old friend, Maxim Gorky. The guide and interpreter assigned to assist us was a lady I had met in Russia in 1914, the

niece of a former Russian Ambassador to London. She was educated at Newnham, she has been imprisoned five times by the Bolshevist Government, she is not allowed to leave Petersburg because of an attempt to cross the frontier to her children in Esthonia, and she was, therefore, the last person likely to lend herself to any attempt to hoodwink me. I mention this because on every hand at home and in Russia I had been told that the most elaborate camouflage of realities would go on, and that I should be kept in blinkers throughout my visit.

As a matter of fact, the harsh and terrible realities of the situation in Russia cannot be camouflaged. In the case of special delegations, perhaps, a certain distracting tumult of receptions, bands, and speeches may be possible, and may be attempted. But it is hardly possible to dress up two large cities for the benefit of two stray visitors, wandering observantly often in different directions. Naturally, when one demands to see a school or a prison one

is not shown the worst. Any country would in the circumstances show the best it had, and Soviet Russia is no exception. One can allow for that.

Our dominant impression of things Russian is an impression of a vast irreparable breakdown. The great monarchy that was here in 1914, the administrative, social, financial, and commercial systems connected with it have, under the strains of six years of incessant war, fallen down and smashed utterly. Never in all history has there been so great a *débâcle* before. The fact of the Revolution is, to our minds, altogether dwarfed by the fact of this downfall. By its own inherent rottenness and by the thrusts and strains of aggressive imperialism the Russian part of the old civilised world that existed before 1914 fell, and is now gone. The peasant, who was the base of the old pyramid, remains upon the land, living very much as he has always lived. Everything else is broken down, or is breaking down. Amid this vast disorganisation an emer-

gency Government, supported by a disciplined party of perhaps 150,000 adherents —the Communist Party—has taken control. It has—at the price of much shooting —suppressed brigandage, established a sort of order and security in the exhausted towns, and set up a crude rationing system.

It is, I would say at once, the only possible Government in Russia at the present time. It is the only idea, it supplies the only solidarity, left in Russia. But it is a secondary fact. The dominant fact for the Western reader, the threatening and disconcerting fact, is that a social and economic system very like our own and intimately connected with our own has crashed.

Nowhere in all Russia is the fact of that crash so completely evident as it is in Petersburg. Petersburg was the artificial creation of Peter the Great; his bronze statue in the little garden near the Admiralty still prances amid the ebbing life of the city. Its palaces are still and empty,

or strangely refurnished with the typewriters and tables and plank partitions of a new Administration which is engaged chiefly in a strenuous struggle against famine and the foreign invader. Its streets were streets of busy shops. In 1914 I loafed agreeably in the Petersburg streets—buying little articles and watching the abundant traffic. All these shops have ceased. There are perhaps half a dozen shops still open in Petersburg. There is a Government crockery shop where I bought a plate or so as a souvenir, for seven or eight hundred roubles each, and there are a few flower shops. It is a wonderful fact, I think, that in this city, in which most of the shrinking population is already nearly starving, and hardly any one possesses a second suit of clothes or more than a single change of worn and patched linen, flowers can be and are still bought and sold. For five thousand roubles, which is about six and eightpence at the current rate of exchange, one can get a very pleasing bunch of big chrysanthemums.

I do not know if the words "all the shops have ceased" convey any picture to the Western reader of what a street looks like in Russia. It is not like Bond Street or Piccadilly on a Sunday, with the blinds neatly drawn down in a decorous sleep, and ready to wake up and begin again on Monday. The shops have an utterly wretched and abandoned look; paint is peeling off, windows are cracked, some are broken and boarded up, some still display a few fly-blown relics of stock in the window, some have their windows covered with notices; the windows are growing dim, the fixtures have gathered two years' dust. They are dead shops. They will never open again.

All the great bazaar-like markets are closed, too, in Petersburg now, in the desperate struggle to keep a public control of necessities and prevent the profiteer driving up the last vestiges of food to incredible prices. And this cessation of shops makes walking about the streets seem a silly sort of thing to do. Nobody

" walks about " any more. One realises that a modern city is really nothing but long alleys of shops and restaurants and the like. Shut them up, and the meaning of a street has disappeared. People hurry past—a thin traffic compared with my memories of 1914. The electric street cars are still running and busy—until six o'clock. They are the only means of locomotion for ordinary people remaining in town—the last legacy of capitalist enterprise. They became free while we were in Petersburg. Previously there had been a charge of two or three roubles—the hundredth part of the price of an egg. Freeing them made little difference in their extreme congestion during the home-going hours. Every one scrambles on the tramcar. If there is no room inside you cluster outside. In the busy hours festoons of people hang outside by any handhold ; people are frequently pushed off, and accidents are frequent. We saw a crowd collected round a child cut in half by a tramcar, and two people in the little

circle in which we moved in Petersburg had broken their legs in tramway accidents.

The roads along which these tramcars run are in a frightful condition. They have not been repaired for three or four years; they are full of holes like shell-holes, often two or three feet deep. Frost has eaten out great cavities, drains have collapsed, and people have torn up the wood pavement for fires. Only once did we see any attempt to repair the streets in Petrograd. In a side street some mysterious agency had collected a load of wood blocks and two barrels of tar. Most of our longer journeys about the town were done in official motor-cars—left over from the former times. A drive is an affair of tremendous swerves and concussions. These surviving motor-cars are running now on kerosene. They disengage clouds of pale blue smoke, and start up with a noise like a machine-gun battle. Every wooden house was demolished for firing last winter, and such masonry as there was

in those houses remains in ruinous gaps, between the houses of stone.

Every one is shabby; every one seems to be carrying bundles in both Petersburg and Moscow. To walk into some side street in the twilight and see nothing but ill-clad figures, all hurrying, all carrying loads, gives one an impression as though the entire population was setting out in flight. That impression is not altogether misleading. The Bolshevik statistics I have seen are perfectly frank and honest in the matter. The population of Petersburg has fallen from 1,200,000 (before 1919) to a little over 700,000, and it is still falling. Many people have returned to peasant life in the country, many have gone abroad, but hardship has taken an enormous toll of this city. The death-rate in Petersburg is over 81 per 1,000; formerly it was high among European cities at 22. The birth-rate of the underfed and profoundly depressed population is about 15. It was formerly about 30.

These bundles that every one carries

are partly the rations of food that are doled out by the Soviet organisation, partly they are the material and results of illicit trade. The Russian population has always been a trading and bargaining population. Even in 1914 there were but few shops in Petersburg whose prices were really fixed prices. Tariffs were abominated; in Moscow taking a droshky meant always a haggle, ten kopecks at a time. Confronted with a shortage of nearly every commodity, a shortage caused partly by the war strain,—for Russia has been at war continuously now for six years—partly by the general collapse of social organisation, and partly by the blockade, and with a currency in complete disorder, the only possible way to save the towns from a chaos of cornering, profiteering, starvation, and at last a mere savage fight for the remnants of food and common necessities, was some sort of collective control and rationing.

The Soviet Government rations on principle, but any Government in Russia now would have to ration. If the war in the

West had lasted up to the present time London would be rationing too—food, clothing, and housing. But in Russia this has to be done on a basis of uncontrollable peasant production, with a population temperamentally indisciplined and self-indulgent. The struggle is necessarily a bitter one. The detected profiteer, the genuine profiteer who profiteers on any considerable scale, gets short shrift; he is shot. Quite ordinary trading may be punished severely. All trading is called "speculation," and is now illegal. But a queer street-corner trading in food and so forth is winked at in Petersburg, and quite openly practised in Moscow, because only by permitting this can the peasants be induced to bring in food.

There is also much underground trade between buyers and sellers who know each other. Every one who can supplements his public rations in this way. And every railway station at which one stops is an open market. We would find a crowd of peasants at every stopping-place waiting

to sell milk, eggs, apples, bread, and so forth. The passengers clamber down and accumulate bundles. An egg or an apple costs 300 roubles.

The peasants look well fed, and I doubt if they are very much worse off than they were in 1914. Probably they are better off. They have more land than they had, and they have got rid of their landlords. They will not help in any attempt to overthrow the Soviet Government because they are convinced that while it endures this state of things will continue. This does not prevent their resisting whenever they can the attempts of the Red Guards to collect food at regulation prices. Insufficient forces of Red Guards may be attacked and massacred. Such incidents are magnified in the London Press as peasant insurrections against the Bolsheviks. They are nothing of the sort. It is just the peasants making themselves comfortable under the existing *régime*.

But every class above the peasants—including the official class—is now in a

state of extreme privation. The credit and industrial system that produced commodities has broken down, and so far the attempts to replace it by some other form of production have been ineffective. So that nowhere are there any new things. About the only things that seem to be fairly well supplied are tea, cigarettes, and matches. Matches are more abundant in Russia than they were in England in 1917, and the Soviet State match is quite a good match. But such things as collars, ties, shoelaces, sheets and blankets, spoons and forks, all the haberdashery and crockery of life, are unattainable. There is no replacing a broken cup or glass except by a sedulous search and illegal trading. From Petersburg to Moscow we were given a sleeping car de luxe, but there were no water-bottles, glasses, or, indeed, any loose fittings. They have all gone. Most of the men one meets strike one at first as being carelessly shaven, and at first we were inclined to regard that as a sign of a general apathy, but we understood better

how things were when a friend mentioned to my son quite casually that he had been using one safety razor blade for nearly a year.

Drugs and any medicines are equally unattainable. There is nothing to take for a cold or a headache; no packing off to bed with a hot-water bottle. Small ailments develop very easily therefore into serious trouble. Nearly everybody we met struck us as being uncomfortable and a little out of health. A buoyant, healthy person is very rare in this atmosphere of discomforts and petty deficiencies.

If any one falls into a real illness the outlook is grim. My son paid a visit to the big Obuchovskaya Hospital, and he tells me things were very miserable there indeed. There was an appalling lack of every sort of material, and half the beds were not in use through the sheer impossibility of dealing with more patients if they came in. Strengthening and stimulating food is out of the question unless the patient's family can by some miracle

procure it outside and send it in. Operations are performed only on one day in the week, Dr. Federoff told me, when the necessary preparations can be made. On other days they are impossible, and the patient must wait.

Hardly any one in Petersburg has much more than a change of raiment, and in a great city in which there remains no means of communication but a few overcrowded tramcars,* old, leaky, and ill-fitting boots are the only footwear. At times one sees astonishing makeshifts by way of costume. The master of a school to which we paid a surprise visit struck me as unusually dapper. He was wearing a dinner suit with a blue serge waistcoat. Several of the distinguished scientific and literary men I met had no collars and wore neck-wraps. Gorky possesses only the one suit of clothes he wears.

At a gathering of literary people in

* I saw one passenger steamboat on the Neva crowded with passengers. Usually the river was quite deserted except for a rare Government tug or a solitary boatman picking up drift timber.

Petersburg, Mr. Amphiteatroff, the well-known writer, addressed a long and bitter speech to me. He suffered from the usual delusion that I was blind and stupid and being hoodwinked. He was for taking off the respectable-looking coats of all the company present in order that I might see for myself the rags and tatters and pitiful expedients beneath. It was a painful and, so far as I was concerned, an unnecessary speech, but I quote it here to emphasise this effect of general destitution. And this underclad town population in this dismantled and ruinous city is, in spite of all the furtive trading that goes on, appallingly underfed. With the best will in the world the Soviet Government is unable to produce a sufficient ration to sustain a healthy life. We went to a district kitchen and saw the normal food distribution going on. The place seemed to us fairly clean and fairly well run, but that does not compensate for a lack of material. The lowest grade ration consisted of a basinful of thin skilly and about the same quantity of

STREET SCENERY IN PETERSBURG.

MR. WELLS DISCOVERS A STREET UNDER REPAIR.

stewed apple compote. People have bread cards and wait in queues for bread, but for three days the Petersburg bakeries stopped for lack of flour. The bread varies greatly in quality; some was good coarse brown bread, and some I found damp, clay-like, and uneatable.

I do not know how far these disconnected details will suffice to give the Western reader an idea of what ordinary life in Petersburg is at the present time. Moscow, they say, is more overcrowded and shorter of fuel than Petersburg, but superficially it looked far less grim than Petersburg. We saw these things in October, in a particularly fine and warm October. We saw them in sunshine in a setting of ruddy and golden foliage. But one day there came a chill, and the yellow leaves went whirling before a drive of snowflakes. It was the first breath of the coming winter. Every one shivered and looked out of the double windows—already sealed up—and talked to us of the previous year. Then the glow of October returned.

It was still glorious sunshine when we left Russia. But when I think of that coming winter my heart sinks. The Soviet Government in the commune of the north has made extraordinary efforts to prepare for the time of need. There are piles of wood along the quays, along the middle of the main streets, in the courtyards, and in every place where wood can be piled. Last year many people had to live in rooms below the freezing point; the water-pipes froze up, the sanitary machinery ceased to work. The reader must imagine the consequences. People huddled together in the ill-lit rooms, and kept themselves alive with tea and talk. Presently some Russian novelist will tell us all that this has meant to heart and mind in Russia. This year it may not be quite so bad as that. The food situation also, they say, is better, but this I very much doubt. The railways are now in an extreme state of deterioration; the wood-stoked engines are wearing out; the bolts start and the rails shift as the trains rumble along at a maximum of

twenty-five miles per hour. Even were the railways more efficient, Wrangel has got hold of the southern food supplies. Soon the cold rain will be falling upon these 700,000 souls still left in Petersburg, and then the snow. The long nights extend and the daylight dwindles.

And this spectacle of misery and ebbing energy is, you will say, the result of Bolshevist rule! I do not believe it is. I will deal with the Bolshevist Government when I have painted the general scenery of our problem. But let me say here that this desolate Russia is not a system that has been attacked and destroyed by something vigorous and malignant. It is an unsound system that has worked itself out and fallen down. It was not communism which built up these great, impossible cities, but capitalism. It was not communism that plunged this huge, creaking, bankrupt empire into six years of exhausting war. It was European imperialism. Nor is it communism that has pestered this suffering and perhaps dying Russia with a

series of subsidised raids, invasions, and insurrections, and inflicted upon it an atrocious blockade. The vindictive French creditor, the journalistic British oaf, are far more responsible for these deathbed miseries than any communist. But to these questions I will return after I have given a little more description of Russia as we saw it during our visit. It is only when one has some conception of the physical and mental realities of the Russian collapse that one can see and estimate the Bolshevist Government in its proper proportions.

II. Drift and Salvage

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AMONG the things I wanted most to see amid this tremendous spectacle of social collapse in Russia was the work of my old friend Maxim Gorky. I had heard of this from members of the returning labour delegation, and what they told me had whetted my desire for a closer view of what was going on. Mr. Bertrand Russell's description of Gorky's health had also made me anxious on his own account; but I am happy to say that upon that score my news is good. Gorky seems as strong and well to me now as he was when I knew him first in 1906. And as a personality he has grown immensely. Mr. Russell wrote that Gorky is dying and that perhaps culture in Russia is dying too. Mr. Russell was, I think, betrayed by the artistic temptation of a dark and purple concluding passage. He found Gorky in

bed and afflicted by a fit of coughing, and his imagination made the most of it.

Gorky's position in Russia is a quite extraordinary and personal one. He is no more of a communist than I am, and I have heard him argue with the utmost freedom in his flat against the extremist positions with such men as Bokaiev, recently the head of the Extraordinary Commission in Petersburg, and Zalutsky, one of the rising leaders of the Communist party. It was a very reassuring display of free speech, for Gorky did not so much argue as denounce—and this in front of two deeply interested English enquirers.

But he has gained the confidence and respect of most of the Bolshevik leaders, and he has become by a kind of necessity the semi-official salvage man under the new *régime*. He is possessed by a passionate sense of the value of Western science and culture, and by the necessity of preserving the intellectual continuity of Russian life through these dark years of famine and war and social stress, with the

general intellectual life of the world. He has found a steady supporter in Lenin. His work illuminates the situation to an extraordinary degree because it collects together a number of significant factors and makes the essentially catastrophic nature of the Russian situation plain.

The Russian smash at the end of 1917 was certainly the completest that has ever happened to any modern social organisation. After the failure of the Kerensky Government to make peace and of the British naval authorities to relieve the situation upon the Baltic flank, the shattered Russian armies, weapons in hand, broke up and rolled back upon Russia, a flood of peasant soldiers making for home, without hope, without supplies, without discipline. That time of *débâcle* was a time of complete social disorder. It was a social dissolution. In many parts of Russia there was a peasant revolt. There was château-burning, often accompanied by quite horrible atrocities. It was an explosion of the very worst side of human

nature in despair, and for most of the abominations committed the Bolsheviks are about as responsible as the Government of Australia. People would be held up and robbed even to their shirts in open daylight in the streets of Petersburg and Moscow, no one interfering. Murdered bodies lay disregarded in the gutters sometimes for a whole day, with passengers on the footwalk going to and fro. Armed men, often professing to be Red Guards, entered houses and looted and murdered. The early months of 1918 saw a violent struggle of the new Bolshevik Government not only with counter-revolutions but with robbers and brigands of every description. It was not until the summer of 1918, and after thousands of looters and plunderers had been shot, that life began to be ordinarily safe again in the streets of the Russian great towns. For a time Russia was not a civilisation, but a torrent of lawless violence, with a weak central Government of inexperienced rulers, fighting not only against unintelligent foreign

intervention but against the completest internal disorder. It is from such chaotic conditions that Russia still struggles to emerge.

Art, literature, science, all the refinements and elaboration of life, all that we mean by "civilisation," were involved in this torrential catastrophe. For a time the stablest thing in Russian culture was the theatre. There stood the theatres, and nobody wanted to loot them or destroy them; the artists were accustomed to meet and work in them and went on meeting and working; the tradition of official subsidies held good. So quite amazingly the Russian dramatic and operatic life kept on through the extremest stormsof violence, and keeps on to this day. In Petersburg we found there were more than forty shows going on every night; in Moscow we found very much the same state of affairs. We heard Shalyapin, greatest of actors and singers, in *The Barber of Seville* and in *Chovanchina;* the admirable orchestra was variously attired, but the conductor still

held out valiantly in swallow tails and a white tie ; we saw a performance of *Sadko*, we saw Monachof in *The Tsarevitch Alexei* and as Iago in *Othello* (with Madame Gorky—Madame Andreievna—as Desdemona). When one faced the stage, it was as if nothing had changed in Russia ; but when the curtain fell and one turned to the audience one realised the revolution. There were now no brilliant uniforms, no evening dress in boxes and stalls. The audience was an undifferentiated mass of people, the same sort of people everywhere, attentive, good-humoured, well-behaved and shabby. Like the London Stage Society, one's place in the house is determined by ballot. And for the most part there is no paying to enter the theatre. For one performance the tickets go, let us say, to the professional unions, for another to the Red Army and their families, for another to the school children, and so on. A certain selling of tickets goes on, but it is not in the present scheme of things.

I had heard Shalyapin in London, but

I had not met him personally there. We made his acquaintance this time in Petersburg, we dined with him and saw something of his very jolly household. There are two stepchildren almost grown up, and two little daughters, who speak a nice, stiff, correct English, and the youngest of whom dances delightfully. Shalyapin is certainly one of the most wonderful things in Russia at the present time. He is the Artist, defiant and magnificent. Off the stage he has much the same vitality and abounding humour that made an encounter with Beerbohm Tree so delightful an experience. He refuses absolutely to sing except for pay—200,000 roubles a performance, they say, which is nearly £15—and when the markets get too tight, he insists upon payment in flour or eggs or the like. What he demands he gets, for Shalyapin on strike would leave too dismal a hole altogether in the theatrical world of Petersburg. So it is that he maintains what is perhaps the last fairly comfortable home in Russia. And Madame Shalyapin

we found so unbroken by the revolution that she asked us what people were wearing in London. The last fashion papers she had seen—thanks to the blockade—dated from somewhen early in 1918.

But the position of the theatre among the arts is peculiar. For the rest of the arts, for literature generally and for the scientific worker, the catastrophe of 1917–18 was overwhelming. There remained no one to buy books or pictures, and the scientific worker found himself with a salary of roubles that dwindled rapidly to less than the five-hundredth part of their original value. The new crude social organisation, fighting robbery, murder, and the wildest disorder, had no place for them; it had forgotten them. For the scientific men at first the Soviet Government had as little regard as the first French revolution, which had "no need for chemists." These classes of worker, vitally important to every civilised system, were reduced, therefore, to a state of the utmost privation and misery. It was to their assistance and

salvation that Gorky's first efforts were directed. Thanks very largely to him and to the more creative intelligences in the Bolshevik Government, there has now been organised a group of salvage establishments, of which the best and most fully developed is the House of Science in Petersburg, in the ancient palace of the Archduchess Marie Pavlova. Here we saw the head-quarters of a special rationing system which provides as well as it can for the needs of four thousand scientific workers and their dependants—in all perhaps for ten thousand people. At this centre they not only draw their food rations, but they can get baths and barber, tailoring, cobbling and the like conveniences. There is even a small stock of boots and clothing. There are bedrooms, and a sort of hospital accommodation for cases of weakness and ill-health.

It was to me one of the strangest of my Russian experiences to go to this institution and to meet there, as careworn and unprosperous-looking figures, some of the

great survivors of the Russian scientific world. Here were such men as Oldenburg the orientalist, Karpinsky the geologist, Pavloff the Nobel prizeman, Radloff, Bielopolsky, and the like, names of world-wide celebrity. They asked me a multitude of questions about recent scientific progress in the world outside Russia, and made me ashamed of my frightful ignorance of such matters. If I had known that this would happen I would have taken some sort of report with me. Our blockade has cut them off from all scientific literature outside Russia. They are without new instruments, they are short of paper, the work they do has to go on in unwarmed laboratories. It is amazing they do any work at all. Yet they are getting work done; Pavloff is carrying on research of astonishing scope and ingenuity upon the mentality of animals; Manuchin claims to have worked out an effectual cure for tuberculosis, even in advanced cases; and so on. I have brought back abstracts of Manuchin's work for translation and publication here,

A Petersburg Street Car en Route.

Messrs. Lenin and Wells in Conversation.

and they are now being put into English. The scientific spirit is a wonderful spirit. If Petersburg starves this winter, the House of Science—unless we make some special effort on its behalf—will starve too, but these scientific men said very little to me about the possibility of sending them in supplies. The House of Literature and Art talked a little of want and miseries, but not the scientific men. What they were all keen about was the possibility of getting scientific publications; they value knowledge more than bread. Upon that matter I hope I may be of some help to them. I got them to form a committee to make me out a list of all the books and publications of which they stood in need, and I have brought this list back to the Secretary of the Royal Society of London, which had already been stirring in this matter. Funds will be needed, three or four thousand pounds perhaps (the address of the Secretary of the Royal Society is Burlington House, W.), but the assent of the Bolshevik Government and our own

to this mental provisioning of Russia has been secured, and in a little time I hope the first parcel of books will be going through to these men, who have been cut off for so long from the general mental life of the world.

If I had no other reason for satisfaction about this trip to Russia, I should find quite enough in the hope and comfort our mere presence evidently gave to many of these distinguished men in the House of Science and in the House of Literature and Art. Upon many of them there had settled a kind of despair of ever seeing or hearing anything of the outer world again. They had been living for three years, very grey and long years indeed, in a world that seemed sinking down steadily through one degree of privation after another into utter darkness. Possibly they had seen something of one or two of the political deputations that have visited Russia—I do not know; but manifestly they had never expected to see again a free and independent individual

walk in, with an air of having come quite easily and unofficially from London, and of its being quite possible not only to come but to go again into the lost world of the West. It was like an unexpected afternoon caller strolling into a cell in a gaol.

All musical people in England know the work of Glazounov; he has conducted concerts in London and is an honorary doctor both of Oxford and Cambridge. I was very deeply touched by my meeting with him. He used to be a big florid man, but now he is pallid and much fallen away, so that his clothes hang loosely on him. He came and talked of his friends Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. He told me he still composed, but that his stock of music paper was almost exhausted. "Then there will be no more." I said there would be much more, and that soon. He doubted it. He spoke of London and Oxford; I could see that he was consumed by an almost intolerable longing for some great city full of life, a city with abundance, with

pleasant crowds, a city that would give him stirring audiences in warm, brightly-lit places. While I was there, I was a sort of living token to him that such things could still be. He turned his back on the window which gave on the cold grey Neva, deserted in the twilight, and the low lines of the fortress prison of St. Peter and St. Paul. "In England there will be no revolution—no? I had many friends in England—many good friends in England. . . ." I was loth to leave him, and he was very loth to let me go.

Seeing all these distinguished men living a sort of refugee life amidst the impoverished ruins of the fallen imperialist system has made me realise how helplessly dependent the man of exceptional gifts is upon a securely organised civilisation. The ordinary man can turn from this to that occupation; he can be a sailor or a worker in a factory or a digger or what not. He is under a general necessity to work, but he has no internal demon which compels him to do a particular

thing and nothing else, which compels him to be a particular thing or die. But a Shalyapin must be Shalyapin or nothing, Pavloff is Pavloff and Glazounov, Glazounov. So long as they can go on doing their particular thing, such men will live and flourish. Shalyapin still acts and sings magnificently—in absolute defiance of every Communist principle; Pavloff still continues his marvellous researches—in an old coat and with his study piled up with the potatoes and carrots he grows in his spare time; Glazounov will compose until the paper runs out. But many of the others are evidently stricken much harder. The mortality among the intellectually distinguished men of Russia has been terribly high. Much, no doubt, has been due to the general hardship of life, but in many cases I believe that the sheer mortification of great gifts become futile has been the determining cause. They could no more live in the Russia of 1919 than they could have lived in a Kaffir kraal.

Science, art, and literature are hothouse plants demanding warmth and respect and service. It is the paradox of science that it alters the whole world and is produced by the genius of men who need protection and help more than any other class of worker. The collapse of the Russian imperial system has smashed up all the shelters in which such things could exist. The crude Marxist philosophy which divides all men into bourgeoisie and proletariat, which sees all social life as a stupidly simple "class war," had no knowledge of the conditions necessary for the collective mental life. But it is to the credit of the Bolshevik Government that it has now risen to the danger of a universal intellectual destruction in Russia, and that, in spite of the blockade and the unending struggle against the subsidised revolts and invasions with which we and the French plague Russia, it is now permitting and helping these salvage organisations. Parallel with the House of Science is the House of Literature and Art. The

writing of new books, except for some poetry, and the painting of pictures have ceased in Russia. But the bulk of the writers and artists have been found employment upon a grandiose scheme for the publication of a sort of Russian encyclopædia of the literature of the world. In this strange Russia of conflict, cold, famine and pitiful privations there is actually going on now a literary task that would be inconceivable in the rich England and the rich America of to-day. In England and America the production of good literature at popular prices has practically ceased now—"because of the price of paper." The mental food of the English and American masses dwindles and deteriorates, and nobody in authority cares a rap. The Bolshevik Government is at least a shade above that level. In starving Russia hundreds of people are working upon translations, and the books they translate are being set up and printed, work which may presently give a new Russia such a knowledge of world thought

trained to contemn intelligent planning. Not even a British business man of the older type is quite such a believer in things righting themselves and in "muddling through" as these Marxists. The Russian Communist Government now finds itself face to face, among a multiplicity of other constructive problems, with the problem of sustaining scientific life, of sustaining thought and discussion, of promoting artistic creation. Marx the Prophet and his Sacred Book supply it with no lead at all in the matter. Bolshevism, having no schemes, must improvise therefore—clumsily, and is reduced to these pathetic attempts to salvage the wreckage of the intellectual life of the old order. And that life is very sick and unhappy and seems likely to die on its hands.

It is not simply scientific and literary work and workers that Maxim Gorky is trying to salvage in Russia. There is a third and still more curious salvage organisation associated with him. This is the Expertise Commission, which has its head-

quarters in the former British Embassy. When a social order based on private property crashes, when private property is with some abruptness and no qualification abolished, this does not abolish and destroy the things which have hitherto constituted private property. Houses and their gear remain standing, still being occupied and used by the people who had them before—except when those people have fled. When the Bolshevik authorities requisition a house or take over a deserted palace, they find themselves faced by this problem of the gear. Any one who knows human nature will understand that there has been a certain amount of quiet annexation of desirable things by inadvertent officials and, perhaps less inadvertently, by their wives. But the general spirit of Bolshevism is quite honest, and it is set very stoutly against looting and suchlike developments of individual enterprise. There has evidently been comparatively little looting either in Petersburg or Moscow since the days of the *débâcle*. Looting died

against the wall in Moscow in the spring of 1918. In the guest houses and suchlike places we noted that everything was numbered and listed. Occasionally we saw odd things astray, fine glass or crested silver upon tables where it seemed out of place, but in many cases these were things which had been sold for food or suchlike necessities on the part of the original owners. The sailor courier who attended to our comfort to and from Moscow was provided with a beautiful little silver teapot that must once have brightened a charming drawing-room. But apparently it had taken to a semi-public life in a quite legitimate way.

For greater security there has been a gathering together and a cataloguing of everything that could claim to be a work of art by this Expertise Commission. The palace that once sheltered the British Embassy is now like some congested second-hand art shop in the Brompton Road. We went through room after room piled with the beautiful lumber of the

former Russian social system. There are big rooms crammed with statuary; never have I seen so many white marble Venuses and sylphs together, not even in the Naples Museum. There are stacks of pictures of every sort, passages choked with inlaid cabinets piled up to the ceiling; a room full of cases of old lace, piles of magnificent furniture. This accumulation has been counted and catalogued. And there it is. I could not find out that any one had an idea of what was ultimately to be done with all this lovely and elegant litter. The stuff does not seem to belong in any way to the new world, if it is indeed a new world that the Russian Communists are organising. They never anticipated that they would have to deal with such things. Just as they never really thought of what they would do with the shops and markets when they had abolished shopping and marketing. Just as they had never thought out the problem of converting a city of private palaces into a Communist gathering-place. Marxist theory had led

their minds up to the " dictatorship of the class-conscious proletariat " and then intimated—we discover now how vaguely—that there would be a new heaven and a new earth. Had that happened it would indeed have been a revolution in human affairs. But as we saw Russia there is still the old heaven and the old earth, covered with the ruins, littered with the abandoned furnishings and dislocated machinery of the former system, with the old peasant tough and obstinate upon the soil —and Communism, ruling in the cities quite pluckily and honestly, and yet, in so many matters, like a conjurer who has left his pigeon and his rabbit behind him, and can produce nothing whatever from the hat.

Ruin ; that is the primary Russian fact at the present time. The revolution, the Communist rule, which I will proceed to describe in my next paper, is quite secondary to that. It is something that has happened in the ruin and because of the ruin. It is of primary importance that

people in the West should realise that. If the Great War had gone on for a year or so more, Germany and then the Western Powers would probably have repeated, with local variations, the Russian crash. The state of affairs we have seen in Russia is only the intensification and completion of the state of affairs towards which Britain was drifting in 1918. Here also there are shortages such as we had in England, but they are relatively monstrous; here also is rationing, but it is relatively feeble and inefficient; the profiteer in Russia is not fined but shot, and for the English D.O.R.A. you have the Extraordinary Commission. What were nuisances in England are magnified to disasters in Russia. That is all the difference. For all I know, Western Europe may be still drifting even now towards a parallel crash. I am not by any means sure that we have turned the corner. War, self-indulgence, and unproductive speculation may still be wasting more than the Western world is producing; in which case our own crash—

currency failure, a universal shortage, social and political collapse and all the rest of it—is merely a question of time. The shops of Regent Street will follow the shops of the Nevsky Prospect, and Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Bennett will have to do what they can to salvage the art treasures of Mayfair. It falsifies the whole world situation, it sets people altogether astray in their political actions, to assert that the frightful destitution of Russia to-day is to any large extent the result merely of Communist effort; that the wicked Communists have pulled down Russia to her present plight, and that if you can overthrow the Communists every one and everything in Russia will suddenly become happy again. Russia fell into its present miseries through the world war and the moral and intellectual insufficiency of its ruling and wealthy people. (As our own British State—as presently even the American State—may fall.) They had neither the brains nor the conscience to stop warfare, stop waste of all sorts, and stop taking the best of every-

thing and leaving every one else dangerously unhappy, until it was too late. They ruled and wasted and quarrelled, blind to the coming disaster up to the very moment of its occurrence. And then, as I describe in the next chapters, the Communist came in. . . .

III. The Quintessence of Bolshevism

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IN the two preceding chapters I have tried to give the reader my impression of Russian life as I saw it in Petersburg and Moscow, as a spectacle of collapse, as the collapse of a political, social, and economic system, akin to our own but weaker and more rotten than our own, which has crashed under the pressure of six years of war and misgovernment. The main collapse occurred in 1917 when Tsarism, brutishly incompetent, became manifestly impossible. It had wasted the whole land, lost control of its army and the confidence of the entire population. Its police system had degenerated into a *régime* of violence and brigandage. It fell inevitably.

And there was no alternative government. For generations the chief energies of Tsarism had been directed to destroying

any possibility of an alternative government. It had subsisted on that one fact that, bad as it was, there was nothing else to put in its place. The first Russian Revolution, therefore, turned Russia into a debating society and a political scramble. The liberal forces of the country, unaccustomed to action or responsibility, set up a clamorous discussion whether Russia was to be a constitutional monarchy, a liberal republic, a socialist republic, or what not. Over the confusion gesticulated Kerensky in attitudes of the finest liberalism. Through it loomed various ambiguous adventurers, "strong men," sham strong men, Russian Monks and Russian Bonapartes. What remained of social order collapsed. In the closing months of 1917 murder and robbery were common street incidents in Petersburg and Moscow, as common as an automobile accident in the streets of London, and less heeded. On the Reval boat was an American who had formerly directed the affairs of the American Harvester Company in Russia. He

THE STATUE OF MARX OUTSIDE THE SMOLNY INSTITUTE.
(Headquarters of the Communist Party.)

had been in Moscow during this phase of complete disorder. He described hold-ups in open daylight in busy streets, dead bodies lying for hours in the gutter—as a dead kitten might do in a western town—while crowds went about their business along the side-walk.

Through this fevered and confused country went the representatives of Britain and France, blind to the quality of the immense and tragic disaster about them, intent only upon *the* war, badgering the Russians to keep on fighting and make a fresh offensive against Germany. But when the Germans made a strong thrust towards Petersburg through the Baltic provinces and by sea, the British Admiralty, either through sheer cowardice or through Royalist intrigues, failed to give any effectual help to Russia. Upon this matter the evidence of the late Lord Fisher is plain. And so this unhappy country, mortally sick and, as it were, delirious, staggered towards a further stage of collapse.

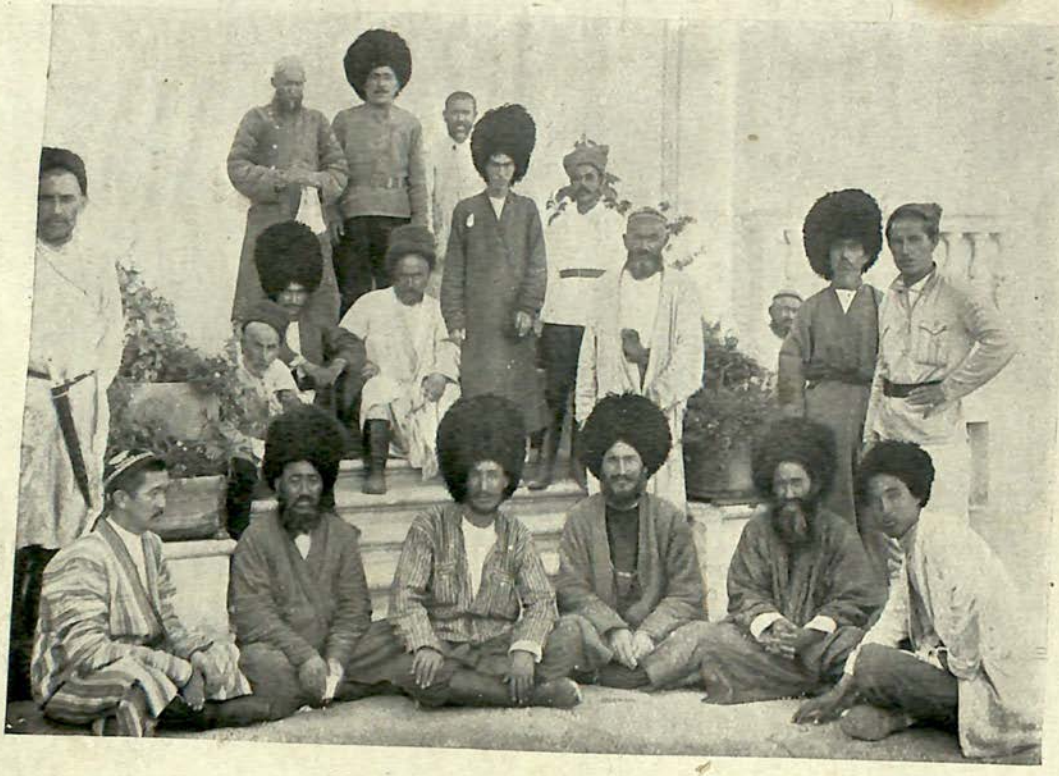
From end to end of Russia, and in the

Russian-speaking community throughout the world, there existed only one sort of people who had common general ideas upon which to work, a common faith and a common will, and that was the Communist party. While all the rest of Russia was either apathetic like the peasantry or garrulously at sixes and sevens or given over to violence or fear, the Communists believed and were prepared to act. Numerically they were and are a very small part of the Russian population. At the present time not one per cent. of the people in Russia are Communists; the organised party certainly does not number more than 600,000 and has probably not much more than 150,000 active members. Nevertheless, because it was in those terrible days the only organisation which gave men a common idea of action, common formulæ, and mutual confidence, it was able to seize and retain control of the smashed empire. It was and it is the only sort of administrative solidarity possible in Russia. These ambiguous adventurers

who have been and are afflicting Russia, with the support of the Western Powers, Deniken, Kolchak, Wrangel and the like, stand for no guiding principle and offer no security of any sort upon which men's confidence can crystallise. They are essentially brigands. The Communist party, however one may criticise it, does embody an idea and can be relied upon to stand by its idea. So far it is a thing morally higher than anything that has yet come against it. It at once secured the passive support of the peasant mass by permitting them to take land from the estates and by making peace with Germany. It restored order—after a frightful lot of shooting—in the great towns. For a time everybody found carrying arms without authority was shot. This action was clumsy and bloody but effective. To retain its power this Communist Government organised Extraordinary Commissions, with practically unlimited powers, and crushed out all opposition by a Red Terror. Much that that Red Terror did

was cruel and frightful, it was largely controlled by narrow-minded men, and many of its officials were inspired by social hatred and the fear of counter-revolution, but if it was fanatical it was honest. Apart from individual atrocities it did on the whole kill for a reason and to an end. Its bloodshed was not like the silly aimless butcheries of the Deniken *régime*, which would not even recognise, I was told, the Bolshevik Red Cross. And to-day the Bolshevik Government sits, I believe, in Moscow as securely established as any Government in Europe, and the streets of the Russian towns are as safe as any streets in Europe.

It not only established itself and restored order, but—thanks largely to the genius of that ex-pacifist Trotsky—it re-created the Russian army as a fighting force. That we must recognise as a very remarkable achievement. I saw little of the Russian army myself, it was not what I went to Russia to see, but Mr. Vanderlip, the enterprising American financier, whom I found



PROLETARIANS OF ASIA A LA BAKU.

in Moscow engaged in some mysterious negotiations with the Soviet Government, had been treated to a review of several thousand troops, and was very enthusiastic about their spirit and equipment. My son and I saw a number of drafts going to the front, and also bodies of recruits joining up, and our impression is that the spirit of the men was quite as good as that of similar bodies of British recruits in London in 1917–18.

Now who are these Bolsheviki who have taken such an effectual hold upon Russia? According to the crazier section of the British Press they are the agents of a mysterious racial plot, a secret society, in which Jews, Jesuits, Freemasons, and Germans are all jumbled together in the maddest fashion. As a matter of fact, nothing was ever quite less secret than the ideas and aims and methods of the Bolsheviks, nor anything quite less like a secret society than their organisation. But in England we cultivate a peculiar style of thinking, so impervious to any general

ideas that it must needs fall back upon the notion of a conspiracy to explain the simplest reactions of the human mind. If, for instance, a day labourer in Essex makes a fuss because he finds that the price of his children's boots has risen out of all proportion to the increase in his weekly wages, and declares that he and his fellow-workers are being cheated and underpaid, the editors of *The Times* and of the *Morning Post* will trace his resentment to the insidious propaganda of some mysterious society at Königsberg or Pekin. They cannot conceive how otherwise he should get such ideas into his head. Conspiracy mania of this kind is so prevalent that I feel constrained to apologise for my own immunity. I find the Bolsheviks very much what they profess to be. I find myself obliged to treat them as fairly straightforward people. I do not agree with either their views or their methods, but that is another question.

The Bolsheviks are Marxist Socialists. Marx died in London nearly forty years

ago; the propaganda of his views has been going on for over half a century. It has spread over the whole earth and finds in nearly every country a small but enthusiastic following. It is a natural result of world-wide economic conditions. Everywhere it expresses the same limited ideas in the same distinctive phrasing. It is a cult, a world-wide international brotherhood. No one need learn Russian to study the ideas of Bolshevism. The enquirer will find them all in the London *Plebs* or the New York *Liberator* in exactly the same phrases as in the Russian *Pravda*. They hide nothing. They say everything. And just precisely what these Marxists write and say, so they attempt to do.

It will be best if I write about Marx without any hypocritical deference. I have always regarded him as a Bore of the extremest sort. His vast unfinished work, *Das Kapital*, a cadence of wearisome volumes about such phantom unrealities as the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*, a

book for ever maundering away into tedious secondary discussions, impresses me as a monument of pretentious pedantry. But before I went to Russia on this last occasion I had no active hostility to Marx. I avoided his works, and when I encountered Marxists I disposed of them by asking them to tell me exactly what people constituted the proletariat. None of them knew. No Marxist knows. In Gorki's flat I listened with attention while Bokaiev discussed with Shalyapin the fine question of whether in Russia there was a proletariat at all, distinguishable from the peasants. As Bokaiev has been head of the Extraordinary Commission of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Petersburg, it was interesting to note the fine difficulties of the argument. The "proletarian" in the Marxist jargon is like the "producer" in the jargon of some political economists, who is supposed to be a creature absolutely distinct and different from the "consumer." So the proletarian is a figure put into flat opposition to something called

capital. I find in large type outside the current number of the *Plebs*, " The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." Apply this to a works foreman who is being taken in a train by an engine-driver to see how the house he is having built for him by a building society is getting on. To which of these immiscibles does he belong, employer or employed ? The stuff is sheer nonsense.

In Russia I must confess my passive objection to Marx has changed to a very active hostility. Wherever we went we encountered busts, portraits, and statues of Marx. About two-thirds of the face of Marx is beard, a vast solemn woolly uneventful beard that must have made all normal exercise impossible. It is not the sort of beard that happens to a man, it is a beard cultivated, cherished, and thrust patriarchally upon the world. It is exactly like *Das Kapital* in its inane abundance, and the human part of the face looks over it owlishly as if it looked to see how the growth impressed mankind. I found the

omnipresent images of that beard more and more irritating. A gnawing desire grew upon me to see Karl Marx shaved. Some day, if I am spared, I will take up shears and a razor against *Das Kapital;* I will write *The Shaving of Karl Marx.*

But Marx is for the Marxists merely an image and a symbol, and it is with the Marxist and not with Marx that we are now dealing. Few Marxists have read much of *Das Kapital.* The Marxist is very much the same sort of person in all modern communities, and I will confess that by my temperament and circumstances I have the very warmest sympathy for him. He adopts Marx as his prophet simply because he believes that Marx wrote of the class war, an implacable war of the employed against the employer, and that he prophesied a triumph for the employed person, a dictatorship of the world by the leaders of these liberated employed persons (dictatorship of the proletariat), and a Communist millennium arising out of that dictatorship. Now this

doctrine and this prophecy have appealed in every country with extraordinary power to young persons, and particularly to young men of energy and imagination who have found themselves at the outset of life imperfectly educated, ill-equipped, and caught into hopeless wages slavery in our existing economic system. They realise in their own persons the social injustice, the stupid negligence, the colossal incivility of our system; they realise that they are insulted and sacrificed by it; and they devote themselves to break it and emancipate themselves from it. No insidious propaganda is needed to make such rebels; it is the faults of a system that half-educates and then enslaves them which have created the Communist movement wherever industrialism has developed. There would have been Marxists if Marx had never lived. When I was a boy of fourteen I was a complete Marxist, long before I had heard the name of Marx. I had been cut off abruptly from education, caught in a detestable shop, and I was

being broken in to a life of mean and dreary toil. I was worked too hard and for such long hours that all thoughts of self-improvement seemed hopeless. I would have set fire to that place if I had not been convinced it was over-insured. I revived the spirit of those bitter days in a conversation I had with Zorin, one of the leaders of the Commune of the North. He is a young man who has come back from unskilled work in America, a very likeable human being and a humorous and very popular speaker in the Petersburg Soviet. He and I exchanged experiences, and I found that the thing that rankled most in his mind about America was the brutal incivility he had encountered when applying for a job as packer in a big dry goods store in New York. We told each other stories of the way our social system wastes and breaks and maddens decent and willing men. Between us was the freemasonry of a common indignation.

It is that indignation of youth and energy, thwarted and misused, it is that

THE BAKU CONFERENCE SWEARS UNDYING HOSTILITY TO CAPITALISM AND BRITISH IMPERIALISM: THE BODY OF THE HALL

THE BAKU CONFERENCE SWEARS UNDYING HOSTILITY TO CAPITALISM AND BRITISH IMPERIALISM. Zenovieff (*by the belly*); to the right of him (*i.e.* on his left) are Radek (*spectacles*) and Bela Kun (*rather foggy*).

and no mere economic theorising, which is the living and linking inspiration of the Marxist movement throughout the world. It is not that Marx was profoundly wise, but that our economic system has been stupid, selfish, wasteful, and anarchistic. The Communistic organisation has provided for this angry recalcitrance certain shibboleths and passwords; "Workers of the World unite," and so forth. It has suggested to them an idea of a great conspiracy against human happiness concocted by a mysterious body of wicked men called capitalists. For in this mentally enfeebled world in which we live to-day conspiracy mania on one side finds its echo on the other, and it is hard to persuade a Marxist that capitalists are in their totality no more than a scrambling disorder of mean-spirited and short-sighted men. And the Communist propaganda has knitted all these angry and disinherited spirits together into a world-wide organisation of revolt—and hope—formless though that hope proves to be on examination. It has chosen Marx

for its prophet and red for its colour. . . . And so when the crash came in Russia, when there remained no other solidarity of men who could work together upon any but immediate selfish ends, there came flowing back from America and the West to rejoin their comrades a considerable number of keen and enthusiastic young and youngish men, who had in that more bracing Western world lost something of the habitual impracticability of the Russian and acquired a certain habit of getting things done, who all thought in the same phrases and had the courage of the same ideas, and who were all inspired by the dream of a revolution that should bring human life to a new level of justice and happiness. It is these young men who constitute the living force of Bolshevism. Many of them are Jews, because most of the Russian emigrants to America were Jews ; but few of them have any strong racial Jewish feeling. They are not out for Jewry but for a new world. So far from being in continuation of the Jewish

tradition the Bolsheviks have put most of the Zionist leaders in Russia in prison, and they have proscribed the teaching of Hebrew as a "reactionary" language. Several of the most interesting Bolsheviks I met were not Jews at all, but blond Nordic men. Lenin, the beloved leader of all that is energetic in Russia to-day, has a Tartar type of face and is certainly no Jew.

This Bolshevik Government is at once the most temerarious and the least experienced governing body in the world. In some directions its incompetence is amazing. In most its ignorance is profound. Of the diabolical cunning of "capitalism" and of the subtleties of reaction it is ridiculously suspicious, and sometimes it takes fright and is cruel. But essentially it is honest. It is the most simple-minded Government that exists in the world to-day.

Its simple-mindedness is shown by one question that I was asked again and again during this Russian visit. "When is the social revolution going to happen in

England ?" Lenin asked me that, Zenovieff, who is the head of the Commune of the North, Zorin, and many others.

Because it is by the Marxist theory all wrong that the social revolution should happen first in Russia. That fact is bothering every intelligent man in the movement. According to the Marxist theory the social revolution should have happened first in the country with the oldest and most highly developed industrialism, with a large, definite, mainly propertyless, mainly wages-earning working class (proletariat). It should have begun in Britain, and spread to France and Germany, then should have come America's turn and so on. Instead they find Communism in power in Russia, which really possesses no specialised labouring class at all, which has worked its factories with peasant labourers who come and go from the villages, and so has scarcely any "proletariat"—to unite with the workers of the world and so forth—at all. Behind the minds of many of these Bolsheviks with

whom I talked I saw clearly that there dawns now a chill suspicion of the reality of the case, a realisation that what they have got in Russia is not truly the promised Marxist social revolution at all, that in truth they have not captured a State but got aboard a derelict. I tried to assist the development of this novel and disconcerting discovery. And also I indulged in a little lecture on the absence of a large "class-conscious proletariat" in the Western communities. I explained that in England there were two hundred different classes at least, and that the only "class-conscious proletarians" known to me in the land were a small band of mainly Scotch workers kept together by the vigorous leadership of a gentleman named MacManus. Their dearest convictions struggled against my manifest candour. They are clinging desperately to the belief that there are hundreds of thousands of convinced Communists in Britain, versed in the whole gospel of Marx, a proletarian solidarity, on the eve of seizing power and

proclaiming a British Soviet Republic. They hold obstinately to that after three years of waiting—but their hold weakens.

Among the most amusing things in this queer intellectual situation are the repeated scoldings that come by wireless from Moscow to Western Labour because it does not behave as Marx said it would behave. It isn't red—and it ought to be. It is just yellow.

My conversation with Zenovieff was particularly curious. He is a man with the voice and animation of Hilaire Belloc, and a lot of curly coal-black hair. "You have civil war in Ireland," he said. "Practically," said I. "Which do you consider are the proletarians, the Sinn Feiners or the Ulstermen?" We spent some time while Zenovieff worked like a man with a jigsaw puzzle trying to get the Irish situation into the class war formula. That jigsaw puzzle remained unsolved, and we then shifted our attention to Asia. Impatient at the long delay of the Western proletarians to emerge and

declare themselves, Zenovieff, assisted by Bela Kun, our Mr. Tom Quelch, and a number of other leading Communists, has recently gone on a pilgrimage to Baku to raise the Asiatic proletariat. They went to beat up the class-conscious wages slaves of Persia and Turkestan. They sought out factory workers and slum dwellers in the tents of the steppes. They held a congress at Baku, at which they gathered together a quite wonderful accumulation of white, black, brown, and yellow people, Asiatic costumes and astonishing weapons. They had a great assembly in which they swore undying hatred of Capitalism and British imperialism; they had a great procession in which I regret to say certain batteries of British guns, which some careless, hasty empire-builder had left behind him, figured; they disinterred and buried again thirteen people whom this British empire-builder seems to have shot without trial, and they burnt Mr. Lloyd George, M. Millerand, and President Wilson in effigy. I not only saw a five-part film of this

remarkable festival when I visited the Petersburg Soviet, but, thanks to Zorin, I have brought the film back with me. It is to be administered with caution and to adults only. There are parts of it that would make Mr. Gwynne of the *Morning Post* or Mr. Rudyard Kipling scream in their sleep. If so be they ever slept again after seeing it.

I did my best to find out from Zenovieff and Zorin what they thought they were doing in the Baku Conference. And frankly I do not think they know. I doubt if they have anything clearer in their minds than a vague idea of hitting back at the British Government through Mesopotamia and India, because it has been hitting them through Kolchak, Deniken, Wrangel, and the Poles. It is a counter-offensive almost as clumsy and stupid as the offensives it would counter. It is inconceivable that they can hope for any social solidarity with the miscellaneous discontents their congress assembled. One item " featured " on this Baku film is a

dance by a gentleman from the neighbourhood of Baku. He is in fact one of the main features of this remarkable film. He wears a fur-trimmed jacket, high boots, and a high cap, and his dancing is a very rapid and dexterous step dancing. He produces two knives and puts them between his teeth, and then two others which he balances perilously with the blades dangerously close to his nose on either side of it. Finally he poises a fifth knife on his forehead, still stepping it featly to the distinctly Oriental music. He stoops and squats, arms akimbo, sending his nimble boots flying out and back like the Cossacks in the Russian ballet. He circles slowly as he does this, clapping his hands. He is now rolled up in my keeping, ready to dance again when opportunity offers. I tried to find out whether he was a specimen Asiatic proletarian or just what he symbolised, but I could get no light on him. But there are yards and yards of film of him. I wish I could have resuscitated Karl Marx, just to watch that solemn stare

over the beard, regarding him. The film gives no indication of the dancer's reception by Mr. Tom Quelch.

I hope I shall not offend Comrade Zorin, for whom I have a real friendship, if I thus confess to him that I cannot take his Baku Conference very seriously. It was an excursion, a pageant, a Beano. As a meeting of Asiatic proletarians it was preposterous. But if it was not very much in itself, it was something very important in its revelation of shifting intentions. Its chief significance to me is this, that it shows a new orientation of the Bolshevik mind as it is embodied in Zenovieff. So long as the Bolsheviki held firmly with unshaken conviction to the Marxist formula they looked westward, a little surprised that the " social revolution " should have begun so far to the east of its indicated centre. Now as they begin to realise that it is not that prescribed social revolution at all but something quite different which has brought them into power, they are naturally enough casting about for a new

system of relationships. The ideal figure of the Russian republic is still a huge western "Worker," with a vast hammer or a sickle. A time may come, if we maintain the European blockade with sufficient stringency and make any industrial recuperation impossible, when that ideal may give place altogether to a nomadic-looking gentleman from Turkestan with a number of knives. We may drive what will remain of Bolshevik Russia to the steppes and the knife. If we help some new Wrangel to pull down the by no means firmly established Government in Moscow, under the delusion that thereby we shall bring about "representative institutions" and a "limited monarchy," we may find ourselves very much out in our calculations. Any one who destroys the present law and order of Moscow will, I believe, destroy what is left of law and order in Russia. A brigand monarchist government will leave a trail of fresh blood across the Russian scene, show what gentlemen can do when they are roused, in a tremendous

pogrom and White Terror, flourish horribly for a time, break up and vanish. Asia will resume. The simple ancient rhythm of the horseman plundering the peasant and the peasant waylaying the horseman will creep back across the plains to the Niemen and the Dniester. The cities will become clusters of ruins in the waste; the roads and railroads will rot and rust; the river traffic will decay. . . .

This Baku Conference has depressed Gorky profoundly. He is obsessed by a nightmare of Russia going east. Perhaps I have caught a little of his depression.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

IV. The Creative Effort in Russia

IV. The Creative Effort in Russia

IN the previous three chapters I have tried to give my impression of the Russian spectacle as that of a rather ramshackle modern civilisation completely shattered and overthrown by misgovernment, under-education, and finally six years of war strain. I have shown science and art starving and the comforts and many of the decencies of life gone. In Vienna the overthrow is just as bad; and there too such men of science as the late Professor Margules starve to death. If London had had to endure four more years of war, much the same sort of thing would be happening in London. We should have now no coal in our grates and no food for our food tickets, and the shops in Bond Street would be as desolate as the shops in the Nevskȳ Prospect. Bolshevik government in Russia

is neither responsible for the causation nor for the continuance of these miseries.

I have also tried to get the facts of Bolshevik rule into what I believe is their proper proportions in the picture. The Bolsheviks, albeit numbering less than five per cent. of the population, have been able to seize and retain power in Russia because they were and are the only body of people in this vast spectacle of Russian ruin with a common faith and a common spirit. I disbelieve in their faith, I ridicule Marx, their prophet, but I understand and respect their spirit. They are—with all their faults, and they have abundant faults—the only possible backbone now to a renascent Russia. The recivilising of Russia must be done with the Soviet Government as the starting phase. The great mass of the Russian population is an entirely illiterate peasantry, grossly materialistic and politically indifferent. They are superstitious, they are for ever crossing themselves and kissing images,—in Moscow particularly they were at it—

but they are not religious. They have no will in things political and social beyond their immediate satisfactions. They are roughly content with Bolshevik rule. The Orthodox priest is quite unlike the Catholic priest in Western Europe; he is himself typically a dirty and illiterate peasant with no power over the wills and consciences of his people. There is no constructive quality in either peasant or Orthodoxy. For the rest there is a confusion of more or less civilised Russians, in and out of Russia, with no common political ideas and with no common will. They are incapable of producing anything but adventurers and disputes.

The Russian refugees in England are politically contemptible. They rehearse endless stories of "Bolshevik outrages"; château-burnings by peasants, burglaries and murders by disbanded soldiers in the towns, back street crimes—they tell them all as acts of the Bolshevik Government. Ask them what government they want in its place, and you will get rubbishy

generalities—usually adapted to what the speaker supposes to be your particular political obsession. Or they sicken you with the praise of some current super-man, Deniken or Wrangel, who is to put everything right—God knows how. They deserve nothing better than a Tsar, and they are incapable even of deciding which Tsar they desire. The better part of the educated people still in Russia are—for the sake of Russia—slowly drifting into a reluctant but honest co-operation with Bolshevik rule.

The Bolsheviks themselves are Marxists and Communists. They find themselves in control of Russia, in complete contradiction, as I have explained, to the theories of Karl Marx. A large part of their energies have been occupied in an entirely patriotic struggle against the raids, invasions, blockades, and persecutions of every sort that our insensate Western Governments have rained upon their tragically shattered country. What is left over goes in the attempt to keep Russia alive, and to

organise some sort of social order among the ruins. These Bolsheviks are, as I have explained, extremely inexperienced men, intellectual exiles from Geneva and Hampstead, or comparatively illiterate manual workers from the United States. Never was there so amateurish a government since the early Moslim found themselves in control of Cairo, Damascus, and Mesopotamia.

I believe that in the minds of very many of them there is a considerable element of dismay at the tremendous tasks they find before them. But one thing has helped them and Russia enormously, and that is their training in Communistic ideas. As the British found out during the submarine war, so far as the urban and industrial population goes there is nothing for it during a time of tragic scarcity but collapse or collective control. We in England had to control and ration, we had to suppress profiteering by stringent laws. These Communists came into power in Russia and began to do at once, on principle, the

first most necessary thing in that chaos of social wreckage. Against all the habits and traditions of Russia, they began to control and ration—exhaustively. They have now a rationing system that is, on paper, admirable beyond cavil; and perhaps it works as well as the temperament and circumstances of Russian production and consumption permit. It is easy to note defects and failures, but not nearly so easy to show how in this depleted and demoralised Russia they could be avoided. And things are in such a state in Russia now that even if we suppose the Bolsheviks overthrown and any other Government in their place, it matters not what, that Government would have to go on with the rationing the Bolsheviks have organised, with the suppression of vague political experiments, and the punishment and shooting of profiteers. The Bolsheviki in this state of siege and famine have done upon principle what any other Government would have had to do from necessity.

And in the face of gigantic difficulties

they are trying to rebuild a new Russia among the ruins. We may quarrel with their principles and methods, we may call their schemes Utopian and so forth, we may sneer at or we may dread what they are doing, but it is no good pretending that there is no creative effort in Russia at the present time. A certain section of the Bolsheviks are hard-minded, doctrinaire and unteachable men, fanatics who believe that the mere destruction of capitalism, the disuse of money and trading, the effacement of all social differences, will in itself bring about a sort of bleak millennium. There are Bolsheviki so stupid that they would stop the teaching of chemistry in schools until they were assured it was " proletarian " chemistry, and who would suppress every decorative design that was not an elaboration of the letters R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic) as reactionary art. I have told of the suppression of Hebrew studies because they are " reactionary " ; and while I was with Gorky I found him in constant bitter

disputes with extremist officials who would see no good in any literature of the past except the literature of revolt. But there were other more liberal minds in this new Russian world, minds which, given an opportunity, will build and will probably build well. Among men of such constructive force I would quote such names as Lenin himself, who has developed wonderfully since the days of his exile, and who has recently written powerfully against the extravagances of his own extremists ; Trotsky, who has never been an extremist, and who is a man of very great organising ability ; Lunacharsky, the Minister for Education ; Rikoff, the head of the Department of People's Economy ; Madame Lilna of the Petersburg Child Welfare Department ; and Krassin, the head of the London Trade Delegation. These are names that occur to me ; it is by no means an exhaustive list of the statesmanlike elements in the Bolshevik Government. Already they have achieved something, in spite of blockade and civil

and foreign war. It is not only that they work to restore a country depleted of material to an extent almost inconceivable to English and American readers, but they work with an extraordinarily unhelpful personnel. Russia to-day stands more in need of men of the foreman and works-manager class than she does of medicaments or food. The ordinary work in the Government offices of Russia is shockingly done; the slackness and inaccuracy are indescribable. Everybody seems to be working in a muddle of unsorted papers and cigarette ends. This again is a state of affairs no counter-revolution could change. It is inherent in the present Russian situation. If one of these military adventurers the Western Powers patronise were, by some disastrous accident, to get control of Russia, his success would only add strong drink, embezzlement, and a great squalour of kept mistresses to the general complication. For whatever else we may say to the discredit of the Bolshevik leaders, it is undeniable that the great

majority lead not simply laborious but puritanical lives.

I write of this general inefficiency in Russia with the more asperity because it was the cause of my not meeting Lunacharsky. About eighty hours of my life were consumed in travelling, telephoning, and waiting about in order to talk for about an hour and a half with Lenin and for the same time with Tchitcherin. At that rate, and in view of the intermittent boat service from Reval to Stockholm, to see Lunacharsky would have meant at least a week more in Russia. The whole of my visit to Moscow was muddled in the most irritating fashion. A sailor-man carrying a silver kettle who did not know his way about Moscow was put in charge of my journey, and an American who did not know enough Russian to telephone freely was set to make my appointments in the town. Although I had heard Gorky arrange for my meeting with Lenin by long-distance telephone days before, Moscow declared that it had had no notice

of my coming. Finally I was put into the wrong train back to Petersburg, a train which took twenty-two hours instead of fourteen for the journey. These may seem petty details to relate, but when it is remembered that Russia was really doing its best to impress me with its vigour and good order, they are extremely significant. In the train, when I realised that it was a slow train and that the express had gone three hours before while we had been pacing the hall of the guest house with our luggage packed and nobody coming for us, the spirit came upon me and my lips were unsealed. I spoke to my guide, as one mariner might speak to another, and told him what I thought of Russian methods. He listened with the profoundest respect to my rich incisive phrases. When at last I paused, he replied—in words that are also significant of certain weaknesses of the present Russian state of mind. "You see," he said, "the blockade ——"

But if I saw nothing of Lunacharsky personally, I saw something of the work

he has organised. The primary material of the educationist is human beings, and of these at least there is still no shortage in Russia, so that in that respect Lunacharsky is better off than most of his colleagues. And beginning with an initial prejudice and much distrust, I am bound to confess that, in view of their enormous difficulties, the educational work of the Bolsheviks impresses me as being astonishingly good.

Things started badly. Directly I got to Petersburg I asked to see a school, and on the second day of my visit I was taken to one that impressed me very unfavourably. It was extremely well equipped, much better than an ordinary English grammar school, and the children were bright and intelligent; but our visit fell in the recess. I could witness no teaching, and the behaviour of the youngsters I saw indicated a low standard of discipline. I formed an opinion that I was probably being shown a picked school specially prepared for me, and that this was all that

Petersburg had to offer. The special guide who was with us then began to question these children upon the subject of English literature and the writers they liked most. One name dominated all others. My own. Such comparatively trivial figures as Milton, Dickens, Shakespeare ran about intermittently between the feet of that literary colossus. Being questioned further, these children produced the titles of perhaps a dozen of my books. I said I was completely satisfied by what I had seen and heard, that I wanted to see nothing more—for indeed what more could I possibly require?—and I left that school smiling with difficulty and thoroughly cross with my guides.

Three days later I suddenly scrapped my morning's engagements and insisted upon being taken at once to another school—any school close at hand. I was convinced that I had been deceived about the former school, and that now I should see a very bad school indeed. Instead I saw a much better one than the first I

had seen. The equipment and building were better, the discipline of the children was better, and I saw some excellent teaching in progress. Most of the teachers were women, very competent-looking middle-aged women, and I chose elementary geometrical teaching to observe because that on the blackboard is in the universal language of the diagram. I saw also a heap of drawings and various models the pupils had done, and they were very good. The school was supplied with abundant pictures. I noted particularly a well-chosen series of landscapes to assist the geographical teaching. There was plenty of chemical and physical apparatus, and it was evidently put to a proper use. I also saw the children's next meal in preparation—for children eat at school in Soviet Russia—and the food was excellent and well cooked, far above the standard of the adult rations we had seen served out. All this was much more satisfactory. Finally by a few questions we tested the extraordinary vogue of H. G. Wells among

the young people of Russia. None of these children had ever heard of him. The school library contained none of his books. This did much to convince me that I was seeing a quite normal school. I had, I now begin to realise, been taken to the previous one not, as I had supposed in my wrath, with any elaborate intention of deceiving me about the state of education in the country, but after certain kindly intrigues and preparations by a literary friend, Mr. Chukovsky the critic, affectionately anxious to make me feel myself beloved in Russia, and a little oblivious of the real gravity of the business I had in hand.

Subsequent enquiries and comparison of my observations with those of other visitors to Russia, and particularly those of Dr. Haden Guest, who also made surprise visits to several schools in Moscow, have convinced me that Soviet Russia, in the face of gigantic difficulties, has made and is making very great educational efforts, and that in spite of the difficulties of the

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general situation the quality and number of the schools *in the towns* has risen absolutely since the Tsarist *régime*. (The peasant, as ever, except in a few "show" localities, remains scarcely touched by these things.) The schools I saw would have been good middle schools in England. They are open to all, and there is an attempt to make education compulsory. Of course Russia has its peculiar difficulties. Many of the schools are understaffed, and it is difficult to secure the attendance of unwilling pupils. Numbers of children prefer to keep out of the schools and trade upon the streets. A large part of the illicit trading in Russia is done by bands of children. They are harder to catch than adults, and the spirit of Russian Communism is against punishing them. And the Russian child is, for a northern child, remarkably precocious.

The common practice of co-educating youngsters up to fifteen or sixteen, in a country as demoralised as Russia is now, has brought peculiar evils in its train.

My attention was called to this by the visit of Bokaiev, the former head of the Petersburg Extraordinary Commission, and his colleague Zalutsky to Gorky to consult him in the matter. They discussed their business in front of me quite frankly, and the whole conversation was translated to me as it went on. The Bolshevik authorities have collected and published very startling, very shocking figures of the moral condition of young people in Petersburg, which I have seen. How far they would compare with the British figures—if there are any British figures—of such bad districts for the young as are some parts of East London or such towns of low type employment as Reading I do not know. (The reader should compare the Fabian Society's report on prostitution, *Downward Paths*, upon this question.) Nor do I know how they would show in comparison with preceding Tsarist conditions. Nor can I speculate how far these phenomena in Russia are the mechanical consequence of privation and overcrowding

in a home atmosphere bordering on despair. But there can be no doubt that in the Russian towns, concurrently with increased educational effort and an enhanced intellectual stimulation of the young, there is also an increased lawlessness on their part, especially in sexual matters, and that this is going on in a phase of unexampled sobriety and harsh puritanical decorum so far as adult life is concerned. This hectic moral fever of the young is the dark side of the educational spectacle in Russia. I think it is to be regarded mainly as an aspect of the general social collapse; every European country has noted a parallel moral relaxation of the young under the war strain; but the revolution itself, in sweeping a number of the old experienced teachers out of the schools and in making every moral standard a subject of debate, has no doubt contributed also to an as yet incalculable amount in the excessive disorder of these matters in present-day Russia.

Faced with this problem of starving and

shattered homes and a social chaos, the Bolshevik organisers are *institutionalising* the town children of Russia. They are making their schools residential. The children of the Russian urban population are going, like the children of the British upper class, into boarding schools. Close to this second school I visited stood two big buildings which are the living places of the boys and of the girls respectively. In these places they can be kept under some sort of hygienic and moral discipline. This again happens to be not only in accordance with Communist doctrine, but with the special necessities of the Russian crisis. Entire towns are sinking down towards slum conditions, and the Bolshevik Government has had to play the part of a gigantic Dr. Barnardo.

We went over the organisation of a sort of reception home to which children are brought by their parents who find it impossible to keep them clean and decent and nourished under the terrible conditions outside. This reception home is the old

Hotel de l'Europe, the scene of countless pleasant little dinner-parties under the old *régime.* On the roof there is still the summertime roof garden, where the string quartette used to play, and on the staircase we passed a frosted glass window still bearing in gold letters the words *Coiffure des Dames.*

Slender gilded pointing hands directed us to the "Restaurant," long vanished from the grim Petersburg scheme of things. Into this place the children come; they pass into a special quarantine section for infectious diseases and for personal cleanliness—nine-tenths of the newcomers harbour unpleasant parasites—and then into another section, the moral quarantine, where for a time they are watched for bad habits and undesirable tendencies. From this section some individuals may need to be weeded out and sent to special schools for defectives. The rest pass on into the general body of institutionalised children, and so on to the boarding schools.

Here certainly we have the "break-up of the family" in full progress, and the Bolshevik net is sweeping wide and taking in children of the most miscellaneous origins. The parents have reasonably free access to their children in the daytime, but little or no control over their education, clothing, or the like. We went among the children in the various stages of this educational process, and they seemed to us to be quite healthy, happy, and contented children. But they get very good people to look after them. Many men and women, politically suspects or openly discontented with the existing political conditions, and yet with a desire to serve Russia, have found in these places work that they can do with a good heart and conscience. My interpreter and the lady who took us round this place had often dined and supped in the Hotel de l'Europe in its brilliant days, and they knew each other well. This lady was now plainly clad, with short cut hair and a grave manner; her husband was a White and serving with

the Poles; she had two children of her own in the institution, and she was mothering some scores of little creatures. But she was evidently keenly proud of the work of her organisation, and she said that she found life—in this city of want, under the shadow of a coming famine—more interesting and satisfying than it had ever been in the old days.

I have no space to tell of other educational work we saw going on in Russia. I can give but a word or so to the Home of Rest for Workmen in the Kamenni Ostrof. I thought that at once rather fine and not a little absurd. To this place workers are sent to live a life of refined ease for two or three weeks. It is a very beautiful country house with big gardens, an orangery, and subordinate buildings. The meals are served on white cloths with flowers upon the table and so forth. And the worker has to live up to these elegant surroundings. It is a part of his education. If in a forgetful moment he clears his throat in the good old resonant peasant manner and

spits upon the floor, an attendant, I was told, chalks a circle about his defilement and obliges him to clean the offended parquetry. The avenue approaching this place has been adorned with decoration in the futurist style, and there is a vast figure of a " worker " at the gates resting on his hammer, done in gypsum, which was obtained from the surgical reserves of the Petersburg hospitals. . . . But after all, the idea of civilising your workpeople by dipping them into pleasant surroundings is, in itself, rather a good one. . . .

I find it difficult to hold the scales of justice upon many of these efforts of Bolshevism. Here are these creative and educational things going on, varying between the admirable and the ridiculous, islands at least of cleanly work and, I think, of hope, amidst the vast spectacle of grisly want and wide decay. Who can weigh the power and possibility of their thrust against the huge gravitation of this sinking system? Who can guess what encouragement and enhancement they may

get if Russia can win through to a respite from civil and foreign warfare and from famine and want? It was of this re-created Russia, this Russia that may be, that I was most desirous of talking when I went to the Kremlin to meet Lenin. Of that conversation I will tell in my final chapter.

V. The Petersburg Soviet

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ON Thursday the 7th of October we attended a meeting of the Petersburg Soviet. We were told that we should find this a very different legislative body from the British House of Commons, and we did. Like nearly everything else in the arrangements of Soviet Russia it struck us as extraordinarily unpremeditated and improvised. Nothing could have been less intelligently planned for the functions it had to perform or the responsibilities it had to undertake.

The meeting was held in the old Winter Garden of the Tauride Palace, the former palace of Potemkin, the favourite of Catherine the Second. Here the Imperial Duma met under the Tsarist *régime*, and I visited it in 1914 and saw a languid session in progress. I went then with Mr. Maurice Baring and one of the Bencken-

dorffs to the strangers' gallery, which ran round three sides of the hall. There was accommodation for perhaps a thousand people in the hall, and most of it was empty. The president with his bell sat above a rostrum, and behind him was a row of women reporters. I do not now remember what business was in hand on that occasion; it was certainly not very exciting business. Baring, I remember, pointed out the large proportion of priests elected to the third Duma; their beards and cassocks made a distinctive feature of that scattered gathering.

On this second visit we were no longer stranger onlookers, but active participants in the meeting; we came into the body of the hall behind the president's bench, where on a sort of stage the members of the Government, official visitors, and so forth find accommodation. The presidential bench, the rostrum, and the reporters remained, but instead of an atmosphere of weary parliamentarianism, we found ourselves in the crowding, the noise, and the

peculiar thrill of a mass meeting. There were, I should think, some two hundred people or more packed upon the semi-circular benches round about us on the platform behind the president, comrades in naval uniforms and in middle-class and working-class costume, numerous intelligent-looking women, one or two Asiatics and a few unclassifiable visitors, and the body of the hall beyond the presidential bench was densely packed with people who filled not only the seats but the gangways and the spaces under the galleries. There may have been two or three thousand people down there, men and women. They were all members of the Petersburg Soviet, which is really a sort of conjoint meeting of its constituent soviets. The visitors' galleries above were equally full.

Above the rostrum, with his back to us, sat Zenovieff, his right-hand man Zorin, and the president. The subject under discussion was the proposed peace with Poland. The meeting was smarting with the sense of defeat and disposed to resent

the Polish terms. Soon after we came in Zenovieff made a long and, so far as I could judge, a very able speech, preparing the minds of this great gathering for a Russian surrender. The Polish demands were outrageous, but for the present Russia must submit. He was followed by an oldish man who made a bitter attack upon the irreligion of the people and government of Russia; Russia was suffering for her sins, and until she repented and returned to religion she would continue to suffer one disaster after another. His opinions were not those of the meeting, but he was allowed to have his say without interruption. The decision to make peace with Poland was then taken by a show of hands. Then came my little turn. The meeting was told that I had come from England to see the Bolshevik *régime;* I was praised profusely; I was also exhorted to treat that *régime* fairly and not to emulate those other recent visitors (these were Mrs. Snowden and Guest and Bertrand Russell) who had enjoyed the hospitality of the republic and

then gone away to say unfavourable things of it. This exhortation left me cold; I had come to Russia to judge the Bolshevik Government and not to praise it. I had then to take possession of the rostrum and address this big crowd of people. This rostrum I knew had proved an unfortunate place for one or two previous visitors, who had found it hard to explain away afterwards the speeches their translators had given the world through the medium of the wireless reports. Happily, I had had some inkling of what was coming. To avoid any misunderstanding I had written out a short speech in English, and I had had this translated carefully into Russian. I began by saying clearly that I was neither Marxist nor Communist, but a Collectivist, and that it was not to a social revolution in the West that Russians should look for peace and help in their troubles, but to the liberal opinion of the moderate mass of Western people. I declared that the people of the Western States were determined to give Russia

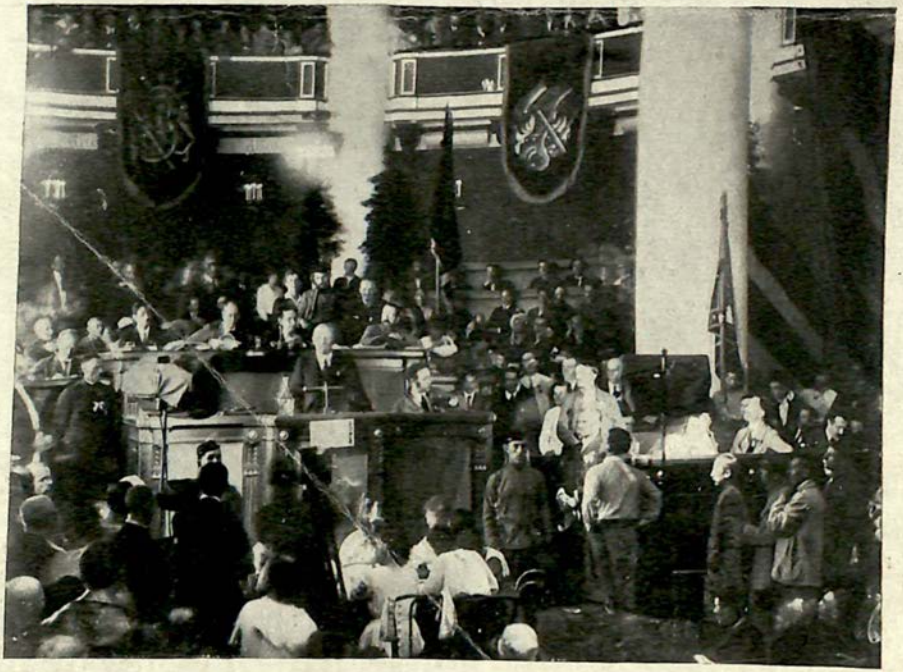
peace, so that she might develop upon her own lines. Their own line of development might be very different from that of Russia. When I had done I handed a translation of my speech to my interpreter, Zorin, which not only eased his task but did away with any possibility of a subsequent misunderstanding. My speech was reported in the *Pravda* quite fully and fairly.

Then followed a motion by Zorin that Zenovieff should have leave to visit Berlin and attend the conference of the Independent Socialists there. Zorin is a witty and humorous speaker, and he got his audience into an excellent frame of mind. His motion was carried by a show of hands, and then came a report and a discussion upon the production of vegetables in the Petersburg district. It was a practical question upon which feeling ran high. Here speakers rose in the body of the hall, discharging brief utterances for a minute or so and subsiding again. There were shouts and interruptions. The debate was

much more like a big labour mass meeting in the Queen's Hall than anything that a Western European would recognise as a legislature.

This business disposed of, a still more extraordinary thing happened. We who sat behind the rostrum poured down into the already very crowded body of the hall and got such seats as we could find, and a white sheet was lowered behind the president's seat. At the same time a band appeared in the gallery to the left. A five-part cinematograph film was then run, showing the Baku Conference to which I have already alluded. The pictures were viewed with interest but without any violent applause. And at the end the band played the *Internationale*, and the audience —I beg its pardon !—the Petersburg Soviet dispersed singing that popular chant. It was in fact a mass meeting incapable of any real legislative activities ; capable at the utmost of endorsing or not endorsing the Government in control of the platform. Compared with the British Parlia-

ment it has about as much organisation, structure, and working efficiency as a big bagful of miscellaneous wheels might have, compared to an old-fashioned and inaccurate but still going clock.



THE PETERSBURG SOVIET IN SESSION.

Lenin at the rostrum; below him are the women stenographers; immediately behind him is Zenovieff and the President. Behind these again are officials and ministerial persons, official visitors and the like.

VI. The Dreamer in the Kremlin

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MY chief purpose in going from Petersburg to Moscow was to see and talk to Lenin. I was very curious to see him, and I was disposed to be hostile to him. I encountered a personality entirely different from anything I had expected to meet.

Lenin is not a writer; his published work does not express him. The shrill little pamphlets and papers issued from Moscow in his name, full of misconceptions of the labour psychology of the West and obstinately defensive of the impossible proposition that it is the prophesied Marxist social revolution which has happened in Russia, display hardly anything of the real Lenin mentality as I encountered it. Occasionally there are gleams of an inspired shrewdness, but for the rest these publications do no more than rehearse the set

ideas and phrases of doctrinaire Marxism. Perhaps that is necessary. That may be the only language Communism understands ; a break into a new dialect would be disturbing and demoralising. Left Communism is the backbone of Russia to-day ; unhappily it is a backbone without flexible joints, a backbone that can be bent only with the utmost difficulty and which must be bent by means of flattery and deference.

Moscow under the bright October sunshine, amidst the fluttering yellow leaves, impressed us as being altogether more lax and animated than Petersburg. There is much more movement of people, more trading, and a comparative plenty of droshkys. Markets are open. There is not the same general ruination of streets and houses. There are, it is true, many traces of the desperate street fighting of early 1918. One of the domes of that absurd cathedral of St. Basil just outside the Kremlin gate was smashed by a shell and still awaits repair. The tramcars we

found were not carrying passengers ; they were being used for the transport of supplies of food and fuel. In these matters Petersburg claims to be better prepared than Moscow.

The ten thousand crosses of Moscow still glitter in the afternoon light. On one conspicuous pinnacle of the Kremlin the imperial eagles spread their wings ; the Bolshevik Government has been too busy or too indifferent to pull them down. The churches are open, the kissing of ikons is a flourishing industry, and beggars still woo casual charity at the doors. The celebrated miraculous shrine of the Iberian Madonna outside the Redeemer Gate was particularly busy. There were many peasant women, unable to get into the little chapel, kissing the stones outside.

Just opposite to it, on a plaster panel on a house front, is that now celebrated inscription put up by one of the early revolutionary administrations in Moscow : " Religion is the Opium of the People." The effect this inscription produces is

greatly reduced by the fact that in Russia the people cannot read.

About that inscription I had a slight but amusing argument with Mr. Vanderlip, the American financier, who was lodged in the same guest house as ourselves. He wanted to have it effaced. I was for retaining it as being historically interesting, and because I think that religious toleration should extend to atheists. But Mr. Vanderlip felt too strongly to see the point of that.

The Moscow Guest House, which we shared with Mr. Vanderlip and an adventurous English artist who had somehow got through to Moscow to execute busts of Lenin and Trotsky, was a big, richly-furnished house upon the Sofiskaya Naberezhnaya (No. 17), directly facing the great wall of the Kremlin and all the clustering domes and pinnacles of that imperial inner city. We felt much less free and more secluded here than in Petersburg. There were sentinels at the gates to protect us from casual visitors,

whereas in Petersburg all sorts of unauthorised persons could and did stray in to talk to me. Mr. Vanderlip had been staying here, I gathered, for some weeks, and proposed to stay some weeks more. He was without valet, secretary, or interpreter. He did not discuss his business with me beyond telling me rather carefully once or twice that it was strictly financial and commercial and in no sense political. I was told that he had brought credentials from Senator Harding to Lenin, but I am temperamentally incurious and I made no attempt whatever to verify this statement or to pry into Mr. Vanderlip's affairs. I did not even ask how it could be possible to conduct business or financial operations in a Communist State with any one but the Government, nor how it was possible to deal with a Government upon strictly non-political lines. These were, I admitted, mysteries beyond my understanding. But we ate, smoked, drank our coffee and conversed together in an atmosphere of profound discretion. By

not mentioning Mr. Vanderlip's "mission," we made it a portentous, omnipresent fact.

The arrangements leading up to my meeting with Lenin were tedious and irritating, but at last I found myself under way for the Kremlin in the company of Mr. Rothstein, formerly a figure in London Communist circles, and an American comrade with a large camera who was also, I gathered, an official of the Russian Foreign Office.

The Kremlin as I remembered it in 1914 was a very open place, open much as Windsor Castle is, with a thin trickle of pilgrims and tourists in groups and couples flowing through it. But now it is closed up and difficult of access. There was a great pother with passes and permits before we could get through even the outer gates. And we were filtered and inspected through five or six rooms of clerks and sentinels before we got into the presence. This may be necessary for the personal security of Lenin, but it puts him out of

reach of Russia, and, what perhaps is more serious, if there is to be an effectual dictatorship, it puts Russia out of his reach. If things must filter up to him, they must also filter down, and they may undergo very considerable changes in the process.

We got to Lenin at last and found him, a little figure at a great desk in a well-lit room that looked out upon palatial spaces. I thought his desk was rather in a litter. I sat down on a chair at a corner of the desk, and the little man—his feet scarcely touch the ground as he sits on the edge of his chair—twisted round to talk to me, putting his arms round and over a pile of papers. He spoke excellent English, but it was, I thought, rather characteristic of the present condition of Russian affairs that Mr. Rothstein chaperoned the conversation, occasionally offering footnotes and other assistance. Meanwhile the American got to work with his camera, and unobtrusively but persistently exposed plates. The talk, however, was too interesting for

that to be an annoyance. One forgot about that clicking and shifting about quite soon.

I had come expecting to struggle with a doctrinaire Marxist. I found nothing of the sort. I had been told that Lenin lectured people ; he certainly did not do so on this occasion. Much has been made of his laugh in the descriptions, a laugh which is said to be pleasing at first and afterwards to become cynical. This laugh was not in evidence. His forehead reminded me of someone else—I could not remember who it was, until the other evening I saw Mr. Arthur Balfour sitting and talking under a shaded light. It is exactly the same domed, slightly one-sided cranium. Lenin has a pleasant, quick-changing, brownish face, with a lively smile and a habit (due perhaps to some defect in focussing) of screwing up one eye as he pauses in his talk ; he is not very like the photographs you see of him because he is one of those people whose change of expression is more important than their

features; he gesticulated a little with his hands over the heaped papers as he talked, and he talked quickly, very keen on his subject, without any posing or pretences or reservations, as a good type of scientific man will talk.

Our talk was threaded throughout and held together by two—what shall I call them?—*motifs*. One was from me to him: "What do you think you are making of Russia? What is the state you are trying to create?" The other was from him to me: "Why does not the social revolution begin in England? Why do you not work for the social revolution? Why are you not destroying Capitalism and establishing the Communist State?" These *motifs* interwove, reacted on each other, illuminated each other. The second brought back the first: "But what are you making of the social revolution? Are you making a success of it?" And from that we got back to two again with: "To make it a success the Western world must join in. Why doesn't it?"

In the days before 1918 all the Marxist world thought of the social revolution as an end. The workers of the world were to unite, overthrow Capitalism, and be happy ever afterwards. But in 1918 the Communists, to their own surprise, found themselves in control of Russia and challenged to produce their millennium. They have a colourable excuse for a delay in the production of a new and better social order in their continuation of war conditions, in the blockade and so forth, nevertheless it is clear that they begin to realise the tremendous unpreparedness which the Marxist methods of thought involve. At a hundred points—I have already put a finger upon one or two of them—they do not know what to do. But the commonplace Communist simply loses his temper if you venture to doubt whether everything is being done in precisely the best and most intelligent way under the new *régime*. He is like a tetchy housewife who wants you to recognise that everything is in perfect order in the middle of

an eviction. He is like one of those now forgotten suffragettes who used to promise us an earthly paradise as soon as we escaped from the tyranny of "man-made laws." Lenin, on the other hand, whose frankness must at times leave his disciples breathless, has recently stripped off the last pretence that the Russian revolution is anything more than the inauguration of an age of limitless experiment. "Those who are engaged in the formidable task of overcoming capitalism," he has recently written, "must be prepared to try method after method until they find the one which answers their purpose best."

We opened our talk with a discussion of the future of the great towns under Communism. I wanted to see how far Lenin contemplated the dying out of the towns in Russia. The desolation of Petersburg had brought home to me a point I had never realised before, that the whole form and arrangement of a town is determined by shopping and marketing, and that the abolition of these things renders nine-

tenths of the buildings in an ordinary town directly or indirectly unmeaning and useless. "The towns will get very much smaller," he admitted. "They will be different. Yes, quite different." That, I suggested, implied a tremendous task. It meant the scrapping of the existing towns and their replacement. The churches and great buildings of Petersburg would become presently like those of Novgorod the Great or like the temples of Paestum. Most of the town would dissolve away. He agreed quite cheerfully. I think it warmed his heart to find someone who understood a necessary consequence of collectivism that many even of his own people fail to grasp. Russia has to be rebuilt fundamentally, has to become a new thing. . . .

And industry has to be reconstructed—as fundamentally?

Did I realise what was already in hand with Russia? The electrification of Russia?

For Lenin, who like a good orthodox

Marxist denounces all "Utopians," has succumbed at last to a Utopia, the Utopia of the electricians. He is throwing all his weight into a scheme for the development of great power stations in Russia to serve whole provinces with light, with transport, and industrial power. Two experimental districts he said had already been electrified. Can one imagine a more courageous project in a vast flat land of forests and illiterate peasants, with no water power, with no technical skill available, and with trade and industry at the last gasp? Projects for such an electrification are in process of development in Holland and they have been discussed in England, and in those densely-populated and industrially highly-developed centres one can imagine them as successful, economical, and altogether beneficial. But their application to Russia is an altogether greater strain upon the constructive imagination. I cannot see anything of the sort happening in this dark crystal of Russia, but this little man at the Kremlin can; he sees the decaying railways

replaced by a new electric transport, sees new roadways spreading throughout the land, sees a new and happier Communist industrialism arising again. While I talked to him he almost persuaded me to share his vision.

"And you will go on to these things with the peasants rooted in your soil?"

But not only are the towns to be rebuilt; every agricultural landmark is to go.

"Even now," said Lenin, "all the agricultural production of Russia is not peasant production. We have, in places, large scale agriculture. The Government is already running big estates with workers instead of peasants, where conditions are favourable. That can spread. It can be extended first to one province, then another. The peasants in the other provinces, selfish and illiterate, will not know what is happening until their turn comes. . . ."

It may be difficult to defeat the Russian peasant *en masse;* but in detail there is no difficulty at all. At the mention of the peasant Lenin's head came nearer to

mine; his manner became confidential. As if after all the peasant *might* overhear.

It is not only the material organisation of society you have to build, I argued, it is the mentality of a whole people. The Russian people are by habit and tradition traders and individualists; their very souls must be remoulded if this new world is to be achieved. Lenin asked me what I had seen of the educational work afoot. I praised some of the things I had seen He nodded and smiled with pleasure He has an unlimited confidence in his work

"But these are only sketches and beginnings," I said.

"Come back and see what we have done in Russia in ten years' time," he answered.

In him I realised that Communism could after all, in spite of Marx, be enormously creative. After the tiresome class-war fanatics I had been encountering among the Communists, men of formulæ as sterile as flints, after numerous experiences of the trained and empty conceit of

the common Marxist devotee, this amazing little man, with his frank admission of the immensity and complication of the project of Communism and his simple concentration upon its realisation, was very refreshing. He at least has a vision of a world changed over and planned and built afresh.

He wanted more of my Russian impressions. I told him that I thought that in many directions, and more particularly in the Petersburg Commune, Communism was pressing too hard and too fast, and destroying before it was ready to rebuild. They had broken down trading before they were ready to ration ; the co-operative organisation had been smashed up instead of being utilised, and so on. That brought us to our essential difference, the difference of the Evolutionary Collectivist and Marxist, the question whether the social revolution is, in its extremity, necessary, whether it is necessary to overthrow one economic system completely before the new one can begin. I believe that through a vast sus-

tained educational campaign the existing Capitalist system can be *civilised* into a Collectivist world system; Lenin on the other hand tied himself years ago to the Marxist dogmas of the inevitable class war, the downfall of Capitalist order as a prelude to reconstruction, the proletarian dictatorship, and so forth. He had to argue, therefore, that modern Capitalism is incurably predatory, wasteful, and unteachable, and that until it is destroyed it will continue to exploit the human heritage stupidly and aimlessly, that it will fight against and prevent any administration of natural resources for the general good, and that, because essentially it is a scramble, it will inevitably make wars.

I had, I will confess, a very uphill argument. He suddenly produced Chiozza Money's new book, *The Triumph of Nationalisation*, which he had evidently been reading very carefully. "But you see directly you begin to have a good working collectivist organisation of any public interest, the Capitalists smash it up

again. They smashed your national shipyards; they won't let you work your coal economically." He tapped the book. "It is all here."

And against my argument that wars sprang from nationalist imperialism and not from a Capitalist organisation of society he suddenly brought: "But what do you think of this new Republican Imperialism that comes to us from America?"

Here Mr. Rothstein intervened in Russian with an objection that Lenin swept aside.

And regardless of Mr. Rothstein's plea for diplomatic reserve, Lenin proceeded to explain the projects with which one American at least was seeking to dazzle the imagination of Moscow. There was to be economic assistance for Russia and recognition of the Bolshevik Government. There was to be a defensive alliance against Japanese aggression in Siberia. There was to be an American naval station on the coast of Asia, and leases for long terms of sixty or fifty years of the natural resources

of Khamskhatka and possibly of other large regions of Russian Asia. Well, did I think that made for peace? Was it anything more than the beginning of a new world scramble? How would the British Imperialists like this sort of thing?

Always, he insisted, Capitalism competes and scrambles It is the antithesis of collective action. It cannot develop into social unity or into world unity.

But some industrial power had to come in and help Russia, I said. She cannot reconstruct now without such help. . . .

Our multifarious argumentation ended indecisively. We parted warmly, and I and my companion were filtered out of the Kremlin through one barrier after another in much the same fashion as we had been filtered in.

"He is wonderful," said Mr. Rothstein. "But it was an indiscretion ——"

I was not disposed to talk as we made our way, under the glowing trees that grow in the ancient moat of the Kremlin, back to our Guest House. I wanted to

think Lenin over while I had him fresh in my mind, and I did not want to be assisted by the expositions of my companion. But Mr. Rothstein kept on talking.

He was still pressing me not to mention this little sketch of the Russian-American outlook to Mr. Vanderlip long after I assured him that I respected Mr. Vanderlip's veil of discretion far too much to pierce it by any careless word.

And so back to No. 17 Sofiskaya Naberezhnaya, and lunch with Mr. Vanderlip and the young sculptor from London. The old servant of the house waited on us, mournfully conscious of the meagreness of our entertainment and reminiscent of the great days of the past when Caruso had been a guest and had sung to all that was brilliant in Moscow in the room upstairs. Mr. Vanderlip was for visiting the big market that afternoon — and later going to the Ballet, but my son and I were set upon returning to Petersburg that night and so getting on to Reval in time for the Stockholm boat.

VII. The Envoy

VII. The Envoy

IN the preceding chapters I have written in the first person and in a familiar style because I did not want the reader to lose sight for a moment of the shortness of our visit to Russia and of my personal limitations. Now in conclusion, if the reader will have patience with me for a few final words, I would like in less personal terms and very plainly to set down my main convictions about the Russian situation. They are deep-seated convictions, and they concern not merely Russia but the whole present outlook of our civilisation. They are merely one man's opinion, but as I feel them strongly, so I put them without weakening qualifications.

First, then, Russia, which was a modern civilisation of the Western type, least disciplined and most ramshackle of all

the Great Powers, is now a modern civilisation *in extremis*. The direct cause of its downfall has been modern war leading to physical exhaustion. Only through that could the Bolsheviks have secured power. Nothing like this Russian downfall has ever happened before. If it goes on for a year or so more the process of collapse will be complete. Nothing will be left of Russia but a country of peasants; the towns will be practically deserted and in ruins, the railways will be rusting in disuse. With the railways will go the last vestiges of any general government. The peasants are absolutely illiterate and collectively stupid, capable of resisting interference but incapable of comprehensive foresight and organisation. They will become a sort of human swamp in a state of division, petty civil war, and political squalour, with a famine whenever the harvests are bad; and they will be breeding epidemics for the rest of Europe. They will lapse towards Asia.

The collapse of the civilised system in

Russia into peasant barbarism means that Europe will be cut off for many years from all the mineral wealth of Russia, and from any supply of raw products from this area, from its corn, flax, and the like. It is an open question whether the Western Powers can get along without these supplies. Their cessation certainly means a general impoverishment of Western Europe.

The only possible Government that can stave off such a final collapse of Russia now is the present Bolshevik Government, if it can be assisted by America and the Western Powers. There is now no alternative to that Government possible. There are of course a multitude of antagonists—adventurers and the like—ready, with European assistance, to attempt the overthrow of that Bolshevik Government, but there are no signs of any common purpose and moral unity capable of replacing it. And moreover there is no time now for another revolution in Russia. A year more of civil war will make the final

sinking of Russia out of civilisation inevitable. We have to make what we can, therefore, of the Bolshevik Government, whether we like it or not.

The Bolshevik Government is inexperienced and incapable to an extreme degree; it has had phases of violence and cruelty; but it is on the whole honest. And it includes a few individuals of real creative imagination and power, who may with opportunity, if their hands are strengthened, achieve great reconstructions. The Bolshevik Government seems on the whole to be trying to act up to its professions, which are still held by most of its supporters with a quite religious passion. Given generous help, it may succeed in establishing a new social order in Russia of a civilised type with which the rest of the world will be able to deal. It will probably be a mitigated Communism, with a large-scale handling of transport, industry, and (later) agriculture.

It is necessary that we should understand and respect the professions and

principles of the Bolsheviks if we Western peoples are to be of any effectual service to humanity in Russia. Hitherto these professions and principles have been ignored in the most extraordinary way by the Western Governments. The Bolshevik Government is, and says it is, a Communist Government. And it means this, and will make this the standard of its conduct. It has suppressed private ownership and private trade in Russia, not as an act of expediency but as an act of right; and in all Russia there remain now no commercial individuals and bodies with whom we can deal who will respect the conventions and usages of Western commercial life. The Bolshevik Government, we have to understand, has, by its nature, an invincible prejudice against individual business men; it will not treat them in a manner that they will consider fair and honourable; it will distrust them and, as far as it can, put them at the completest disadvantage. It regards them as pirates—or at best as privateers. It is hopeless and

impossible therefore for individual persons and firms to think of going into Russia to trade. There is only one being in Russia with whom the Western world can deal, and that is the Bolshevik Government itself, and there is no way of dealing with that one being safely and effectually except through some national or, better, some international Trust. This latter body, which might represent some single Power or group of Powers, or which might even have some titular connection with the League of Nations, would be able to deal with the Bolshevik Government on equal terms. It would have to recognise the Bolshevik Government and, in conjunction with it, to set about the now urgent task of the material restoration of civilised life in European and Asiatic Russia. It should resemble in its general nature one of the big buying and controlling trusts that were so necessary and effectual in the European States during the Great War. It should deal with its individual producers on the one hand, and

the Bolshevik Government would deal with its own population on the other. Such a Trust could speedily make itself indispensable to the Bolshevik Government. This indeed is the only way in which a capitalist State can hold commerce with a Communist State. The attempts that have been made during the past year and more to devise some method of private trading in Russia without recognition of the Bolshevik Government were from the outset as hopeless as the search for the North-West passage from England to India. The channels are frozen up.

Any country or group of countries with adequate industrial resources which goes into Bolshevik Russia with recognition and help will necessarily become the supporter, the right hand, and the consultant of the Bolshevik Government. It will react upon that Government and be reacted upon. It will probably become more collectivist in its methods, and, on the other hand, the rigours of extreme Communism in Russia

will probably be greatly tempered through its influence.

The only Power capable of playing this *rôle* of eleventh-hour helper to Russia single-handed is the United States of America. That is why I find the adventure of the enterprising and imaginative Mr. Vanderlip very significant. I doubt the conclusiveness of his negotiations; they are probably only the opening phase of a discussion of the Russian problem upon a new basis that may lead it at last to a comprehensive world treatment of this situation. Other Powers than the United States will, in the present phase of world-exhaustion, need to combine before they can be of any effective use to Russia. Big business is by no means antipathetic to Communism. The larger big business grows the more it approximates to Collectivism. It is the upper road of the few instead of the lower road of the masses to Collectivism.

The only alternative to such a helpful intervention in Bolshevik Russia is, I

firmly believe, the final collapse of all that remains of modern civilisation throughout what was formerly the Russian Empire. It is highly improbable that the collapse will be limited to its boundaries. Both eastward and westward other great regions may, one after another, tumble into the big hole in civilisation thus created. Possibly all modern civilisation may tumble in.

These propositions do not refer to any hypothetical future ; they are an attempt to state the outline facts and possibilities of what is going on—and going on with great rapidity—in Russia and in the world generally now, as they present themselves to my mind. This in general terms is the frame of circumstance in which I would have the sketches of Russia that have preceded this set and read. So it is I interpret the writing on the Eastern wall of Europe.

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on 28 December, 2018